

# ***IOWA OUTDOORS***

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**[www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)**

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**Feb. 4, 2003**

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## **WINTER CAMPING AND PARK USE**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Finally. There's enough snow on the ground to call it winter. Last Tuesday's flakes had barely stopped falling when the first ATV buzzed down the road. Just after nightfall, I could see the lights from snowmobiles, on what might have been their first run in a couple years. Dual tracks in the snow showed where cross country skiers had finally ventured outside.

I like warm weather as much as the next person. However, a blanket of snow gives Iowa a look...and recreation opportunities...you are not going to find in warmer climes. "No bugs, no poison ivy, no competition for campsites," assesses longtime winter camper Chuck Unga. "You sort of 'escape' society. As a wilderness experience, it's more believable when you get away from people." And while they don't always qualify as deep wilderness, outdoor opportunities are as close as the nearest state or county park. The beach and boat rental might be a little slow. However, a steady stream of park users keeps the trails, woods and, occasionally, the campgrounds busy through the cold weather months.

"Ice fishing is probably the most popular activity here," observes Lake Macbride State Park manager Ron Puettman. "It's not unusual to see a dozen portable ice huts stretched along the old road, just east of the beach." Driving through the parking lot

Monday, I noticed cars from five different counties, just up the hill from the lake's ice fishing hot spot. Snowmobilers take advantage of the 5-mile trail from Solon to the park, and the designated trail, which includes a loop through the woods. Cross country skiing and people out 'just walking' make up a big share of Macbride's day users. Camping? Puettman says a couple RVs might come through each month. Late in the winter, a scout troop spends the weekend.

Those overnight park users have plenty of room in most parks. "In the 50 degree weather earlier this winter, we had some campers; mostly RVs who could hook up electricity," notes Lori Eberhard, manager at George Wyth State Park, at Waterloo. "We might get a couple on a weekend. Day use is a lot more popular. With the Cedar River and two lakes here, we get a lot of bird watchers and trail users, besides ice anglers." Eberhard says 90 people signed up for an ice fishing derby earlier this month, which featured an ice *rescue* demonstration.

Most state parks offer a lake, river or some ice fishing lure for winter park activity. Sitting on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, Bellevue State Park is high and dry. But that suits eagle watchers just fine. "We have bald eagles perching on trees on the bluff," says Shannon Peterson, the park's manager. "The view from here is great. People will come just to watch eagles soaring to and from the river. We also get walkers and hikers who want a workout, on the main hill."

"We have pretty steady ice fishing through the winter; perch, crappies and bluegills," notes Pleasant Creek Recreation Area manager Joan Flecksing. "We also have 14 miles of trails that get lots of snowmobile use, and even some equestrian traffic in the winter." Before the snow, we even had mountain bikers out here. And as a recreation area, hunting is allowed around Pleasant Creek, on species like cottontail rabbits, with late season end dates.

"We do have some winter camping; primarily RV camping. There aren't many tent campers," says Deb Coates, ranger at Pilot Knob State Park. Snowmobiles and horses are on the trails. We have skating as well as ice fishing on our 5-acre lake."

A layer of snow and a lack of leaves make wildlife watching easier. Park deer seem a little more tolerant of people within 30 or 40 yards, especially in cold weather, as they conserve energy by staying put instead of bolting. The couple days after a new snowfall are great for introducing kids to wildlife tracks and feeding habits. Those 'close together' tracks show a slow moving rabbit in a feeding area. Small disturbances in the snow shows where a squirrel dug up an acorn. A larger 'raked over' area would be a flock of turkeys moved through. Bird life, whether it is a backyard cardinal or a rare pileated woodpecker, shows up much better, contrasted against a snowy backdrop.

And if you're still not convinced that an Iowa winterscape is the place to be; be patient. It always goes away. The big question is whether it will be in March or in May.

## **Cold Weather Preparation Takes the Bite Out of Winter**

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to enjoying the winter is lack of preparation. The wrong clothes and gear can, at best, make you miserable. At worst, they can threaten your survival in windy, subzero cold.

Staying dry is probably the most important rule. “When moisture gets into your insulation layers, it takes away the air space which makes insulation effective in the first place,” explains Chuck Ungs. A naturalist with the Linn County Conservation Department, Ungs is a longtime winter camper in places like northern Minnesota’s Boundary Waters. “You need an initial layer of clothing, such as polypropylene, to ‘wick’ away moisture from your skin. Fleece is a pretty good clothing layer. It moves that moisture away from you and also has the thickness to hold in heat.” Ungs also gives high marks to wool clothing, though it can be a little too heavy, and down-insulated outerwear.

Sleeping pads and winter weight sleeping bags are critical in avoiding ‘northern exposure’. “A mummy bag is a good choice,” stresses Ungs. “Pull the string tight around your neck to prevent body heat from escaping. Cinch the hood around your face to do likewise.” He also says a draft tube will insulate the zipper, rather than letting heat out through the bag’s cold spot. In a pinch, double sleeping bags will fill the bill.

Just ahead of a winter scout camporee last weekend, Jeff McDowall of Iowa City and his son Caleb sat through an Ungs camping session. And it paid off. “I’ve hunted and fished all my life, but it was amazing how much more I had to learn about the proper gear,” admits McDowall. “We each had two sleeping bags, one inside the other. It was cold enough outside that there was frost inside the tent. But it was a pretty comfortable night.”

Other cold weather camping tips from Ungs:

- Avoid heat loss. Even breathing and perspiration steal away heat.
- Drink lots of fluid. Ungs prefers herbal teas, rather than diuretics, such as coffee.
- Dress in layers. Remove layers to avoid sweating. Add them to avoid getting cold.
- Your ‘outer shell’ should keep wind and moisture away from the layers beneath
- Have two sets of boot liners. Be drying one set, while you wear the other
- In heavy snow, showshoes are the way to go. A trail sled is better than a backpack.
- Gaiters are worth their weight in gold, by keeping snow (and moisture) out of footwear.
- A vent in your tent keeps air circulating; moving moist, exhaled air away from you.
- Hang sleeping bags to store them. Rolling them up reducing their insulating ‘loft’.
- Usually, top of the line products are worth the cost. Rent if you’re not sure.
- Test your gear first in the backyard. You always have the ‘house option’ if it fails.

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## **FOR IOWA'S FLYING TIGER -- THE SPRING NESTING SEASON IS IN FULL SWING**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE--Well, they're at it again. You know -- the neighbors. The ones that live out back in the woods.

They were so loud one night last week that I almost called the sheriff's office. I didn't, of course. They would have just laughed at me. After all, it's February and great horned owls are supposed to be noisy at this time of the year.

THROUGHOUT ITS RANGE, the great horned owl is the very first bird species to begin nesting each spring. Without fail, the ritual begins with plenty of noise. In addition to the deep resonate calling that is the "Hoot Owl's" trademark, spring courtship is also punctuated by a variety of sounds that can only be described as --well -- very unowl-like. Anyway, forget frigid temperatures and howling winds, as far as the pair in my backyard is concerned the season has arrived.

Horned owls build no nests of their own, but will lay their eggs wherever a suitable platform can be found. For the third consecutive year, this pair has chosen to rear their young in an abandoned red-tailed hawk's nest.

Normally, the female owl will be sitting on eggs by mid-February. The pair got off to an unusually early start this year, and the female has already been incubating for a full week. But in this case, sitting down on the job does not necessarily mean light duty. On Monday night, for example, it meant keeping the eggs warm and growing as the nest was rocked by winds gusting to 40 mph and wind chills plummeted to minus 23 degrees. But the same extreme weather conditions that pose life threatening dangers to other bird species only serves to invigorate the appetite of this abnormally rugged raptor.

OFTEN REFERRED TO AS IOWA'S FLYING TIGER, the great horned owl is one of the bird world's most formidable predators. Few meat eaters, winged or otherwise, can hold a candle to the pure unbridled savagery of an adult horned owl that has recently failed to punch its meal ticket.

Although rabbits and rodents are mainstays, the horned owl's menu may also include such exotic items as stray cats, striped skunks, other raptors -- even hen turkeys. Horned owls are also one of the few natural enemies of the common crow. Crows, in turn, reserve a special level of hatred just for owls. Whenever an owl is spotted, the alarm is sounded and crows will come for miles to mob their most despised enemy.

The most dramatic example of the horned owl's ferocity came in the 1960s. A Canadian hiker was killed in a freak accident when an adult great horned apparently

mistook his muskrat cap for an easy meal. The hiker died of a severed vertebrae. Once its hunger is aroused, the Flying Tiger becomes a force to reckon with.

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## **2002 EXPLORE IOWA PARKS WINNERS ANNOUNCED**

DES MOINES - Three lucky campers were winners in the Iowa DNR's Explore Iowa Parks camping promotion in 2002. The Explore Iowa Parks program awarded prizes to campers who stayed in a number of the 18 participating state parks. Campers could earn prizes for camping in as few as four participating parks or they could try for one of three grand prizes by camping in 10 of the 18 participating parks.

Emy and Larry Lavenz, of Waterloo, won first prize of a Palomino fold-down trailer donated by Herold Trailer Sales in Indianola and MidAmerican Energy. Chuck and Pat Custer, from Randalia, won second prize of a two-person kayak donated by CanoeSport Outfitters in Indianola. Jeff and Carmen Grooms, from Ottumwa, won third prize of the camping coupon book good for seven nights of camping in Iowa State Parks. The winners will be featured in the March/April edition of the Iowa Conservationist magazine.

The grand prize drawing was held in late November and the three winners were contacted in December to receive their prizes.

The State Parks Bureau is currently finalizing plans for the 2003 Explore Iowa Parks Program. The program will be much the same as last year with a few improvements. The bureau plans on kicking off the program in May.

**For more information, contact Sherry Arntzen at 515/242-6233.**

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## **ICE FISHING ACTION IS HEATING UP AT BRUSHY CREEK**

LEHIGH – The quiet evening at Brushy Creek Lake is interrupted by the sound of a powered ice auger boring through the ice. Faces peek out of the 15 or so ice fishing shanties this evening to see who is setting up, and where on the lake. Those same faces will peek out every so often to see which fish house has more fish laying next to it, just in case they want to move.

Brushy Creek is receiving a lot attention from ice anglers, and with good reason. The fishing has been good.

“The lake gets pretty busy on the weekends,” said Kevin Henning, park technician at Dolliver State Park. Henning has a permanent ice fishing shanty near the east boat ramp and spends a lot of time fishing for walleyes.

“The walleyes are averaging 15 to 20 inch range and I’ve heard people say they look like footballs. There nice healthy fish,” Henning said. “We had some really good fishing early, but the action has slowed somewhat recently.”

Greg Van Fosson, DNR parks district supervisor, has spent a lot of time fishing along side Henning.

“We have been fishing in 40 to 50 feet of water, and what we found this year is that the walleyes are within one to two foot from the bottom,” Van Fosson said. “Snap jigging a jigging spoon and minnow seems to work the best. Just sitting still doesn’t seem to work. We’ve been using about three-eights ounce spoons.”

But walleyes aren’t the only species being caught. Anglers at the north end are catching crappies, bluegills, largemouth bass and an occasional walleye. The best time is from 4 to 6 p.m., then again later in the night for crappie and walleye.

“Right now the hotspot seems to be the north end of the lake and it seems to be a mixed bag – bass, crappie and bluegill,” Henning said. “People also fish the roadbed and in the area of the west boat ramp, so there are a lot of possibilities.”

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## **DNR ANNOUNCES NEW LAKES AND STREAMS PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has hired Mike McGhee as the new Iowa lakes and rivers projects coordinator.

McGhee will coordinate restoration efforts at existing lakes, including dredging and improvements in the lake watershed. He will also work with lakes that are still in the planning stages, by providing input on watershed improvements and other work to allow the lake to have the best water quality possible.

“One of our goals is to remove our lakes from the impaired waters list, and to work to prevent any additional lakes from being listed as impaired,” McGhee said.

McGhee will also work with the Marine Fuel Tax grant committee that provides money to local groups working to improve access or water quality in lakes and rivers. He will also be working to form a state lake association and with the watershed groups.

McGhee, originally from Wichita, Kan., was the fish management biologist working out of the DNR's Mt. Ayr fish hatchery for nearly 27 years. He worked with local and state groups to help build Three Mile and Twelve Mile lakes in Union County, and oversaw numerous existing lake renovation projects.

For more information, contact McGhee at 515-281-6281, or by e-mail at [mike.mcghee@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:mike.mcghee@dnr.state.ia.us).

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## **ICE FISHING SHELTERS MUST BE REMOVED BY FEB. 20**

DES MOINES – The Feb. 20 deadline to remove permanent ice fishing shelters from state owned land and water is rapidly approaching and anglers are encouraged to not wait until the last minute to get them off the ice.

Failing to remove the permanent shelter is subject to a misdemeanor fine. If the shelter falls through the ice, the owner is responsible for removing it and subject to an additional littering fine.

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## **WALLEYE, PIKE SEASON CLOSES FEB. 15 ON IOWA GREAT LAKES**

SPIRIT LAKE – The walleye and northern pike fishing season on Spirit, East and West Okoboji lakes will close on Feb. 15, and will open again on May 3. These are the only lakes in Iowa that have a closed season for walleye and northern pike.

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# ***IOWA FISHING REPORT***

**For the week of February 20, 2003**

**[www.state.ia.us/fish](http://www.state.ia.us/fish)**

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report. Ice fishing reports will be released every week while quality ice conditions exist.

## **Southeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 16 – 19:** Backwater areas of the Mississippi on Pools 16 – 19 continue to have solid ice conditions. Fishing for crappie and bluegills is good in **Bell's Pocket** in Pool 18. Blaze orange jigs are a popular color. Pool 17 anglers at **Big Timber** and **Hidden Acres** are reporting good fishing for bluegills and slow to fair fishing success for crappie.

**Lake Odessa** (Louisa): Bluegills are still being caught off the trees and stumps in Sand Run. Work a teardrop and wax worm close to the bottom with a slow jigging motion. The fish are hitting light so keep an eye on the line and be ready to set the hook.

**Lake Geode** (Henry): Good numbers of bluegills and redears are being caught off the ledges that run parallel to the boat ramp shoreline. The late freeze up means there is plenty of oxygen at the bottom so that is where they are catching them. Mid-day and early afternoon seems to be the best time to catch them.

**Washington, Keokuk and Jefferson County Conservation Board Ponds:** The warm weather at the end of last week has cost us some ice but there is still 6 to 8 inches of good clear ice. Try some of the county conservation board ponds for some action on the bluegills and crappies.

**Lake Rathbun** (Appanoose): Crappies have been biting on small tube jigs and jigs tipped with minnows. A variety of sizes are being caught. Atwell's Landing, Honey Creek Cove and the Southfork area have been the most productive.

**Lake Wapello** (Davis): Bluegills and crappies have been biting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. Largemouth bass have also been biting. Don't forget the catch and release regulation for largemouth bass.

**Lake Miami** (Monroe): Bluegills and crappies have been hitting on small jigs tipped with wax worms.

**Lake Sugema** (Van Buren): Crappies and bluegills have been hitting on jigs tipped with a wax worm or a minnow.

**Lake Macbride** (Johnson): Crappie fishing has been fair near the power lines on jigs tipped with wax worms and minnows. An occasional walleye is also being caught.

**Diamond Lake** (Poweshiek): Fishing has been fair in the evenings for crappie and bluegills on jigs tipped with wax worms. Anglers are reminded that minnow usage is prohibited in this lake.

**Pleasant Creek** (Linn): Anglers have been catching a few crappie and bluegills on the west end of the lake and near the dam.

**Coralville Reservoir** (Johnson): Crappie fishing has been fair throughout the reservoir near brush and deeper holes.

**For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.**

## **Northeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 9 – 14:** Anglers using snowmobiles or All-terrain vehicles for transportation on the ice, should use caution because there are a few open water areas on the Mississippi backwaters. In Pool 9, **Shore Slough** and **Big Lake**, near Lansing, and the **DeSoto Bay** area have been fair for bluegills, perch and crappies. Northern Pike and largemouth bass are biting on tip-ups baited with golden shiners. In



Pool 10, anglers are catching panfish in the **Sturgeon Slough** area at Marquette and **Norwegian Lake** near McGregor. Fishing at **Mudhen Lake**, near Harpers Ferry, and nearby backwaters with sufficient depth, has been good for largemouth bass, bluegills, perch and crappie. In Pool 12, **Fish Trap** and **Kehough** are fair for bluegills and crappie. At **Browns Lake** and Green Island, in Pool 13, fishing is good for bluegills and crappie. Pool 14, some bluegills and crappies are being caught in **Cattail Slough**. Fishing is fair for bluegills and crappies at **Schrickers** and good at **Rock Creek**. Fishing is good for bluegills and crappies at **Mallard Bay**. Anglers fishing Pools 12 – 14 have been mainly using wax worms and artificial lures.

**Nashua Impoundment** (Chickasaw): Bluegill and yellow perch are good in the evenings.

**Volga Lake** (Fayette): Bluegills are good near deep brush piles.

**Lake Hendricks** (Howard): Bluegills are good and crappies are fair. The best action is in the mornings and evenings.

For current information on trout fishing during the winter, call the **Manchester Trout Hatchery** at 563-927-5736, the **Big Spring Hatchery** at 563-245-1699 and the **Decorah Hatchery** at 563-382-3315.

**For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.**

### **Northwest**

There is some open water on Spirit, East and West Okoboji lakes and the strong winds from last weekend caused the open areas to grow. Anglers need to use extra caution because the ice conditions are so variable.

**Spirit Lake** (Dickinson): Yellow perch are fair. Anglers are using pilkees to teardrops and tipping them with minnows, wax worms or wigglers. The best areas have been the east and south side of the lake, with some success on the grade. Bluegills and crappies are fair to good at the north end of the Grade. Walleyes are still biting on the east side and a few have been caught out from Crandall's Beach on the north end.

**West Okoboji** (Dickinson): Walleye fishing is slow, but some are being caught in Miller's Bay and at the north end of the lake. Minnows seem to be the bait of choice. Crappies are also slow, but some are being caught in Miller's Bay and in Smith's Bay. Bluegill fishing is excellent, especially in Smith's Bay and in the north end of the lake. Bluegills are starting to be caught in Miller's Bay. Teardrops with a wiggler or wax worm seem to be the preferred bait. Northern pike fishing is great. Pike are being caught throughout the lake. Good locations are in Miller's and Smith's bays and in the north end of the lake. Try using chubs. Yellow perch are slow. Some being caught with teardrops and a wiggler or wax worm in Smith's Bay.

**East Okoboji** (Dickinson): Anglers are catching a few walleyes in front of Parks marina.

**Lake Minnewashta** (Dickinson): Bluegills are fair.

**Silver Lake** (Palo Alto): Yellow perch fishing remains hit and miss with the best bite being in the afternoon. Minnows and slip bobbers or jigs with a minnow head are good producers.

**Elk Lake** (Clay): Anglers are catching some walleyes. The best action is toward the evening.

**West Swan Lake** (Emmet): Northern pike are excellent using a chub under a tip-up. Most fish are 18 to 22 inches.

**Badger Lake** (Webster): Crappies are good on live minnows, especially in the morning hours. The fish are running 8 to 9 inches. Bluegills are good using a teardrop tipped with a wax worm. Bluegills are averaging 7-1/2 to 8-1/2 inches.

**Brushy Creek** (Webster): Walleye fishing is good in 40 feet of water. Use a jigging spoon tipped with a minnow. The best action is late in the afternoon.

**Arrowhead** (Sac): Fishing is good for 7 to 8-1/2 inch bluegills on teardrops and wax worms.

**Oldham Lake** (Monona): Bluegills are good. The fish are 7 to 8-inches.

**Black Hawk Lake** (Sac): Bluegills and catfish are fair to good fishing off the rock piles and Ice House Point using teardrops tipped with wax worms. A few walleyes are being taken in the evening hours. Anglers need to use caution. There is open water on the north side and in the Dennison Beach area.

**Clear Lake** (Cerro Gordo): Walleye fishing is fair to good. The best activity is between 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Use minnows on tip-ups or jigging spoons. Yellow bass are being caught around the island on jigging spoons tipped with cut bait or minnows. Most are being caught just before sunset.

**Indian Lake**, Eldred Sherwood Park (Hancock): bluegill fishing is good. Some sorting is required, but 7 to 8-inch fish are available. Use a small ice jig tipped with a wax worm.

**For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.**

### **Southwest**

**Big Creek Lake** (Polk): Bluegill fishing has been spotty in the main lake, with some fish being caught in the "Lost Lake" area, using small tear-drops or kastmasters baited with wax worms. Crappies are fair using minnows on bare hooks with split shot. Reports indicate fish are deep and most fish taken around daybreak and after dark. Walleyes are good using kastmasters and small jigging spoons. Most walleye are below the legal length limit, with some reported up to 4 pounds.

**Don Williams** (Boone): Crappie fishing is fair with most anglers using wax worms and minnows. Some largemouth bass have also been reported, although most are below the minimum length.

**Lake Ahquabi** (Warren): Bluegill fishing is slow to fair using wax worms and minnows. There was open water two weeks ago in the middle of the lake that has recently frozen so ice conditions vary greatly across the lake.

**Hooper Lake** (Warren): Some bluegills have been caught, although generally fishing activity has been slow due to ice and weather conditions.

**Rock Creek** (Jasper): Crappie fishing has been slow using wax worms and minnows. Ice conditions have been spotty over the past few weeks, particularly near the dam area.

**Easter Lake** (Polk): Crappies are fair on wax worms. A few largemouth bass have been taken along the face of the dam.

**Hickory Grove Lake** (Story): Crappies and bluegills are fair using wax worms and jigs.

**Greenfield** (Adair): Fishing is excellent for bluegills on jigs tipped with wax worms around structure in 10 to 20 feet of water. Ice varies 8 to 12 inches.

**Viking** (Montgomery): Bluegill and crappie are good on teardrops tipped with wax worms and minnows and best in early morning hours and before sunset.

**Manawa** (Pottawattamie): Anglers are catching bluegill near tin can dike using teardrop tipped with wax worms.

**Willow** (Harrison): Bluegills are good on wax worms.

**Three Mile** (Union): Ice varies from 6 to 10 inches, with some open water areas that the waterfowl are keeping open, so be careful. Bluegills are good on wax worms early morning and evening hours in flooded timber near road beds. Crappie and walleyes, with a few larger ones, are being caught on minnows.

**Twelve Mile** (Union): Ice varies from 6 to 10 inches with some open water areas, so be careful. Fishing is good for walleyes, bluegill, crappie and small yellow bass in early morning and evening hours in flooded timber or areas northeast of the west dock.

**Fogle** (Ringgold): Bluegill, channel catfish, and crappie are excellent in flooded timber and brush piles on wax worms.

**Green Valley** (Union): Fishing is fair for crappie and bluegill in east arm, and good for catfish.

**Badger Creek** (Madison): Fishing is generally slow during the day. The best activity is in morning and evening for bluegill and crappie.

**West Lake Osceola** (Clarke): Bluegill and crappie are fair; the best bite is in morning and evening hours.

**Little River** (Decatur): Bluegill, crappie, and walleye are good in flooded timber areas near creek channel.

**Slip Bluff** (Decatur): Bluegills are good beside flooded trees.

**Farm Ponds**: Ice fishing is good for bluegill on wax worms. Ice varies from 5 to 10 inches.

**For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.**

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